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## Viewing cable 06BEIRUT2390, TFLE01: HIZBALLAH'S RECKLESSNESS SPLITS AOUN'S

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### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#06BEIRUT2390**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">06BEIRUT2390</a>	<a href="#">2006-07-14 13:29</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Beirut</a>

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/13/2016  
TAGS: [IS](#) [KDEM](#) [LE](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: TFLE01: HIZBALLAH'S RECKLESSNESS SPLITS AOUN'S ADVISORS

SUMMARY

11. (C) Aounist advisor MP Ibrahim Kanaan expressed frustration and deep concern over the present course of events in Lebanon and said he has advised his party leader General Michel Aoun to put distance between himself and Hassan Nasrallah. Kanaan is convinced that Hizballah, with "its extreme overconfidence," will soon lose control over the rapidly escalating hostilities. In his view, the resulting loss of life and stability will produce a severe backlash in Christian, and possibly Sunni, communities that could destroy Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement, since it is currently viewed as a Hizballah ally. Kanaan suggested, however, that the current crisis may offer an opportunity for Aoun and PM Siniora to form a pro-reform "partnership." Senior Aoun advisor Gebran Bassil, on the other hand, defended Hizballah's actions and said Siniora's government was merely reaping the whirlwind created by its passivity and refusal to share power. Moderate Aounist MP Farid el-Khazen, meanwhile, split the difference: strongly criticizing Hizballah's duplicity and recklessness, while recommending aloofness from the star-crossed Siniora government. Perhaps reflecting his party's divisions over the current crisis, Aoun himself gave a confused performance in a British television interview on July 13. End summary.

A CRITICAL MOMENT

12. (C) In a July 13 discussion with poloff, MP Ibrahim Kanaan, who is frequently used as an intermediary and spokesperson by Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) leader Michel Aoun, said that FPM's association with Hizballah has been a mistake. Declaring that Michel Aoun did not have the slightest idea that Hizballah was planning such a provocative act, Kanaan professed deep concern that Hizballah was now effectively steering the ship of state. When asked if he thought Hassan Nasrallah was acting like a Minister of Defense, Kanaan retorted, "no, no, much more than that."

13. (C) Kanaan half-heartedly defended the troublesome February 6 compact between the FPM and Hizballah, saying it originally held the promise of bringing Hizballah into Lebanon's political mainstream. But he conceded that the previous day's "reckless" ambush in Israeli territory is threatening to completely undo Lebanon's struggling democracy and threatens to deliver the country back into the tender mercies of Syria.

14. (C) Expressing fear that events were rapidly spiraling beyond the control of the participants, Kanaan suggested that only a radical change in the political dynamic could hope to forestall the demise of Lebanon's democratic experiment. Although Kanaan said he did not have authorization from Aoun, he felt even Aoun now realized the criticality of the moment and would be amenable to a "partnership" with embattled PM Siniora. According to Kanaan, who insisted he could persuade Aoun of the benefits of such an arrangement, only some form of unity government, comprising the FPM and the March 14 alliance, could hold off the "blatant" power grab being executed by Hizballah.

15. (C) Kanaan remarked despondently that strong anti-Aoun elements in the March 14 alliance (mostly Maronite competitors for the presidency) would try to scuttle such an attempt, even in the midst of a national crisis, but he saw no other way to curtail Hizballah's attempt to establish itself as the pre-eminent authority in Lebanon -- and in the process, greatly assisting the regional designs of Syria and Iran.

THE OTHER VOICE OF AOUN

¶6. (C) Arguably the most senior advisor to Aoun, Gebran Bassil, presented a dramatically different interpretation of the past 24 hours in a meeting with poloff late on July 13. Although he maintained that neither he nor Michel Aoun had any prior notice of Hizballah's July 12 operation, Bassil contended that Hassan Nasrallah had clearly warned his fellow participants in the National Dialogue process more than a month ago that he was going to "solve" the issue of Lebanese prisoners held in Israeli jails. "No one should be surprised at yesterday's events," Bassil stated. When asked how

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unilateral and dangerous action by a non-state player would affect Lebanon's nascent democracy, Bassil blandly responded that the Siniora government was the real problem blocking Lebanon's progress, not Hizballah.

¶7. (C) Bassil went into his oft-repeated litany of complaints about the "passivity and incompetence" of the Siniora government, and once again charged that the Saad Hariri-led parliamentary majority was only trying to create a system dominated by the country's Sunni elite. He argued that Siniora and Hariri had their chance last summer, "when the General wanted to become a part of the government," but now they were simply reaping the results of poor performance and self-centered interests.

¶8. (C) Concerning how he felt the current situation would resolve itself, Bassil said both sides, under the urging of the international community, should cease hostilities and enter into rapid negotiations on the overarching prisoner issue. Bassil was noticeably nonchalant about the possibility that events were fast approaching a dangerous level for the region.

#### A MODERATE ADRIFT

¶9. (C) Aounist MP Farid el-Khazen, recognized for his reasoned defense of FPM positions, told a second emboff in a telephone conversation on July 13 that by its actions the previous day Hizballah had deliberately cast aside its responsibilities to Lebanon and had forced a unnecessary crisis with regional implications -- and complications. While still attempting to defend FPM's previous position that Siniora's government was a failed institution, el-Khazen admitted that Hizballah had exercised powers that should be strictly reserved to the state -- and had greatly endangered Lebanon's security.

¶10. (C) El-Khazen was somewhat at a loss as to where things were heading and how Lebanon's political leadership should respond, but he was reluctant to trust the Hariri-led majority when, in his view, it had failed so completely. He was adamant that the cycle of escalation had to be broken -- and broken soon -- before the country suffered any more damage. But as to how that could actually be accomplished, he could not say.

#### AN OPAQUE PERFORMANCE

¶11. (C) Late in the afternoon of July 13, Michel Aoun made his arguments in a British television interview that was quickly re-broadcast on several Lebanese stations. Perhaps reflecting the conflicting advice he is apparently receiving from his closest advisors, former General Aoun swore that he had no prior knowledge of the attack by Hizballah and that he had offered his support to the Siniora government. But he then launched into an inconsistent condemnation of Israeli culpability and an odd defense of Hizballah's prerogatives.

¶12. (C) Aoun did call for an immediate cessation of hostilities by both sides, but also one-sidedly criticized Israel for hitting "Lebanon's infrastructure." His tone was conciliatory and he was clearly striving to appear the statesman, but as is often the case, his message was muddled

and difficult to follow.

¶13. (C) Comment: The deep crisis in which Lebanon finds itself because of Hizballah's outrageous provocation may well have some useful side effects. If Michel Aoun is forced because of public opinion to reconsider his ill-considered alliance with Hizballah, that is all to the good. Seeing the possibility of realigning Aoun's affections, PM Siniora already took the initiative to call the General twice during this crisis, to brief him on the situation and ask for his support. How delightful if, because of this Crisis, Aoun is faced with two options: either stick with Hizballah -- and lose Christian support -- or shift alliances to the March 14 majority, thus cornering Hizballah.  
FELTMAN